

WHAT TO DO WITH THOSE LEFTOVERS!

When the party's over, discard any foods that remained on the buffet table for more than 2 hours. Other leftovers can be refrigerated or frozen in shallow containers. Leftovers in the refrigerator should be used within 4 days. In the freezer they are safe indefinitely, but most will have best quality if used within 2-4 months.

It is safe to refrigerate or freeze leftovers. Wrap tightly for best quality.

STORAGE IN THE REFRIGERATOR

(40 °F or below)

Cooked meat or poultry 3 to 4 days
Fried chicken..... 3 to 4 days
Pizza 3 to 4 days
Foods such as egg, tuna,
macaroni, or potato salad. 3 to 5 days
Luncheon meats 3 to 5 days
Gravy..... 1 to 2 days

Foods stored longer may begin to spoil or become unsafe to eat.

STORAGE IN THE FREEZER

(0 °F or below)

Cooked meat or poultry 3 to 6 months
Fried chicken..... 4 months
Pizza, luncheon meats..... 1 to 2 months

Salads made with mayonnaise do not freeze well.

Foods kept frozen longer than recommended times are safe, but may be drier and may not taste as good.

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

For more information about food safety, call
USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline:

1-800-535-4555

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time,
Monday through Friday.

In the Washington, DC area, call
(202) 720-3333

TTY: 1-800-256-7072

FSIS Web site: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

FSIS Fast Fax: 1-800-238-8281

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Washington, DC 20006

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Safe Handling of Complete Meals to Go

DINNERS

**Beef • Ham • Lamb
Chicken**



**Food Safety
and Inspection
Service**

COMPLETE MEALS TO GO

**Holidays • Weddings • Graduations
Tailgate Parties • Picnics
Other Occasions**

In today's busy world, many convenience foods, including complete meals to go are experiencing runaway popularity. Some are hot, and some are cold. Most are consumed immediately, although there are times when ready prepared foods are purchased in advance to be eaten at a later time.

All foods are perishable and can cause illness when mishandled. Proper handling is essential to ensure the food is safe.

The 2-Hour Rule

Harmful bacteria can grow rapidly in the "danger zone" (between 40 and 140 °F). So remember the 2-hour rule. Discard any perishable foods left at room temperature longer than 2 hours. If you are eating outdoors at a picnic or cookout where temperatures are over 90 °F, discard after 1 hour.

Keep HOT foods HOT!

Keep COLD foods COLD!

PURCHASED HOT

Eating Within 2 Hours?

Pick up food HOT and keep it HOT. Eat and enjoy your food within 2 hours to prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying.

Not Eating Within 2 Hours?

Keeping foods **warm is not enough**. Harmful bacteria grow rapidly between 40 and 140 °F.

Set oven temperature high enough to keep the food at or above 140 °F. (Use a food thermometer.) Stuffing and side dishes must also stay **HOT**. Covering with foil will help keep your food moist.

Eating Much Later?

It's not a good idea to try and keep foods hot longer than 2 hours. They will be safer and taste better if you:

- Divide meat or poultry into small portions to refrigerate or freeze.
- Refrigerate or freeze gravy, potatoes, and other vegetables in shallow containers.
- Remove stuffing from whole cooked poultry and refrigerate.

Reheating?

You may wish to reheat your meal, whether it was purchased hot and then refrigerated or purchased cold initially. Heat thoroughly to 165 °F until hot and steaming. Bring gravy to a rolling boil. If heating in a microwave oven, cover food and rotate dish so it heats evenly. Inadequate heating in the microwave can contribute to illnesses. Consult your microwave owner's manual for complete instructions.

PURCHASED COLD

(Cooked and Refrigerated or Frozen)

Keep COLD Food COLD

Refrigerate or freeze immediately. Cold food should be held at 40 °F or colder.

Do you see the USDA inspection seal on a refrigerated or frozen meat product?

This seal on the label tells you the meat or poultry was prepared in a USDA-inspected plant. Read and follow package directions for thawing, reheating, and storing.

BUFFET SERVICE

Hot foods should be held at 140 °F or warmer. On the buffet table you can keep hot foods hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Cold foods should be held at 40 °F or colder. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. Otherwise, use small serving trays and replace them often.

PICNICS, TAILGATE PARTIES, & OTHER OCCASIONS

When meals are purchased to eat at a later time, like a picnic, sporting event, or outdoor buffet, a cooler with ice is a practical alternative to a refrigerator. The cooler should be well insulated and packed with ice or freezer packs. Remember the 2-hour rule when food is removed from the cooler.